

Having an accessible website is an invaluable way of reaching disabled people as potential customers, partners and employees. Clearly laid out, accessible websites are also easier to use for everyone so are good for business all round. It is a requirement of the Disability Discrimination Act that websites should be accessible to disabled people if goods and services are offered over the Internet. Websites may also be covered under the employment provisions of the Act if they are used to advertise job vacancies. This factsheet gives an outline of some recent research findings on website accessibility and sources of further information and support.

In research published in November 2005, 200 Internet users with a variety of impairments were asked by **User Vision** to identify and rank the main things that make a website accessible to them. The findings reveal their top five were:

1. An effective in-site search mechanism
2. A sitemap
3. Clear well-labelled links
4. Good internal page navigation
5. Facility to change font size / page appearance

This highlights the need to focus on navigation and content issues as well as the underlying coding of the site.

Meanwhile, research from e-Government Unit of the Cabinet Office showed that virtually every government website in Europe was inaccessible! Only 3% of the 436 sites checked passed basic accessibility guidelines. A frequent problem was that images were not given descriptive tags to let people using screen reading software know what they were. For more on this visit:

<http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/e-government/resources/eaccessibility/index.asp>

This news followed on from a year-long formal investigation into website accessibility by the former **Disability Rights Commission** (DRC). The results, announced in 2004, were that of the 1000 websites surveyed, 81% failed to conform to the basic accessibility guidelines laid out by the Web Accessibility Initiative. See Formal Investigation report: on web accessibility at:

www.equalityhumanrights.com/Documents/Disability/Accessibility%20guidance/web%20access%20and%20inclusion.rtf (Rich Text Doc)

The DRC later sponsored the British Standards Institution (BSI) to develop new good practice guidance on commissioning accessible websites. This includes

info on how disabled people use websites, accessibility policies, testing, auditing, contracting, upholding and managing existing WC3 specifications, and involving disabled people in website development. It is called the Publicly Available Specification (PAS) 78.

One electronic copy of the guidance is available free per individual or business. This is available from the following link on the Equality and Human Rights Commission's website:

www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publicationsandresources/Disability/Pages/Websiteaccessibilityguidance.aspx

Otherwise, PAS costs £30, is available in different formats and can be ordered from BSI Customer Services on **020 8996 9001** or e-mail: orders@bsi-global.com.

Ability Net, an organisation which provides information about computer technology, recently checked out ten charity websites for accessibility. Only one, Cancer Research UK, scored their minimum of 3 stars for accessibility. For more information and brief details of their criteria, visit the Ability net website at:

<http://www.abilitynet.org.uk/enation10>

The Ability Net helpline can be contacted on **0800 269 545** or **01926 312847**, email: enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk. Their website www.abilitynet.org.uk contains useful information on making Information and Communications Technology (ICT) accessible to disabled people.

For more guidance and advice on website accessibility and on ways to remove barriers for your existing and potential website users, visit:

W3C specifications for Web Content Accessibility:

www.w3.org/WAI/

IBM Web Accessibility Guidelines:

<http://www-03.ibm.com/able/guidelines/web/accessweb.html>

New web standards are currently under construction.

For more information, contact the Independent Employment Advocacy Centre on:

Tel: **0161 273 5412**

Answerphone minicom: **0161 273 5727**

Email: advocacy@breakthrough-uk.co.uk.

Please tell us about any access requirements when you get in touch.

Further good practice information is available online at www.breakthrough-uk.com.